

Novatia Note 020:

How to implement an ICT Strategic Plan in MATs: FOUR vital actions

Key Points

- Do you have your plan, budget and team ready?
- What do you do next to save money, time and problems?
- Check these FOUR essentials are in place:
 1. Communications Plan
 2. Business cases
 3. Strong governance
 4. Expertise in Trust-wide procurement
- Need further advice ?
- Get in touch

Background: When it comes to implementing an ICT Strategic Plan, there are the obvious things that need to be done: have a robust plan in place; have the budget in place; put the team in place.

However, there are FOUR other vital actions to take:

1. A realistic plan to build and maintain trust and relationships
2. Expertly drawn up business cases to go to the MAT Executive
3. Strong governance
4. Expertise in MAT wide ICT Procurement.

This Novatia Note looks at each in turn.

1. A realistic plan to build and maintain trust and relationships

Too often communicating with 'stakeholders' is presented as a functional part of the Project Plan – another thing 'to do' and 'tick off'. It might be that it begins well but then the pressures of implementation and delivery mount – it's too easy to make the Comms Plan the thing that gets dropped.

Our experience is that regular, two-way communication is crucial throughout the whole implementation of the ICT Strategic Plan.

Why?

First, because this is a long-term project. Implementing an ICT Strategy typically takes between 3 to 5 years. Many of the benefits aren't seen for the first few months and some take years to realise. You have to keep everyone on-board for the whole journey or you will waste time and effort having to re-engage them.

Next, because these are the people who are going to be affected as the strategic ICT plan is implemented .

Professional respect and courtesy to your colleagues demands letting them know what is happening, how the plan is progressing, listening to and acting on their concerns.

How do you create a realistic communications plan?

You need to base it around the question: what do we need to do so each group of people involved trusts us?

First, determine what you need to do to build trust now, at the start of the implementation.

You are looking for 'quick wins' that show them you are listening and can solve the IT problems that are on their list.

Carry on listening and asking for feedback, as you did previously in the ICT Audit and Review stage. You should build in regular update meetings with each group of people.

Keep them:

- short (30 minutes)
- focused – report on any issues that affect them and what is being done about it
- encouraging – share the latest wins and progress
- engaging – you should 'talk' for 15 minutes then listen for 15 minutes and answer their questions.

For Senior Teams, whose buy in is crucial and whose lack of buy-in means the ICT Strategic Plan could be pulled, take a similar approach but back it up with a short (one side of A4) summary report. Make sure this details progress as well as challenges.

2. Expertly drawn up business cases to go to the MAT Executive

We have seen well thought through ICT Strategic Plans falter at the first execution hurdle because the business cases for each element were poorly drawn up.

The business case must illustrate the strategic benefits of such a change, including:

- operational efficiencies
- equitable quality of service
- improved business continuity
- a cost model showing cost savings.

Choosing the right person to research, prepare and then pull together these strategic ICT business cases is critically important. These business cases are what the Executive body have to base their decisions on and know they are good decisions.

If you don't have someone internally who has this critical experience, then approach a company like Novatia to bring in their consultants to develop the business cases.

3. Strong governance on all strategic ICT decisions

As you implement the ICT Strategic Plan, you need to have robust governance in place in the form of an ICT Strategic Group.

This group will:

- ensure your ICT solutions enable your desired educational outcomes
- be an influential group which govern all strategic decisions regarding ICT across your entire organisation
- meet regularly to contribute, discuss, determine and implement strategic ICT decisions
- be collaborative, effective and drive forward the strategic ICT plans.

As a result, your school or Trust will make cohesive, united and championed strategic ICT decisions, which means that your ICT Strategic Plan and the benefits of it will be realised.

Many MATs have found it useful to bring in an external [ICT Strategic Facilitator](#) to help and guide you as you set up, mobilise, run and hold to account your ICT Strategic Group.

4. Expertise in MAT wide ICT Procurement

Any Strategic ICT Plan will involve ICT Procurement on a Trust-wide level. Make sure you have the right expertise in place to set up, run, and manage these procurements.

An expert ICT Procurement Team should be able to:

- determine if centralised ICT procurement is right for the desired outcome
- model projected savings and future efficiencies
- write the bid strategy and documentation
- produce the functional/technical/service specification
- have procurement management, contract management and installation oversight.

If you feel that you don't have that expertise internally, then bring it in. Read [this case study](#) for further thoughts and information.

Conclusion

As you prepare to implement your ICT Strategic Plan, think beyond the obvious elements of execution and good plan management. Addressing the four areas we've covered at the start of your implementation journey can save you a lot of time, money and hassle over the years it will take to bring the plan to fruition.

Novatia are experts at ICT in UK Education. Do contact us for a no obligation discussion about your organisation's ICT issues and how we can help you.